

AN EASTER MESSAGE FROM OUR MODERATOR

Dear Friends in Christ,

Do you follow a particular spiritual practice during Holy Week? For me, reading and praying the final chapters of the Gospel of John helps me take the risk of yet again opening my heart to the deep pain and deep peace held within our sacred story.

John's account of his life with Jesus wasn't recorded, as far as we know, for many years following Jesus' death-likely around 85-90 AD. It was decades after that horrific murder of his friend before John could record the words he had heard Jesus say: "Do not let your hearts be troubled" (Jn. 14:1), decades of absorbing and interpreting the events and meaning of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Generations later we do the same today-listening to the story, trying to make sense of it for ourselves and our times. No story holds more power or meaning for us.

It was when Jesus' friends gathered following his death that Christ appeared to them, bringing peace, reassurance, direction, and challenge-God's love made known, the living Christ made known. Like those first friends, we gather as friends of Jesus following his devastating death to discover new life and direction in the saving, healing power of Christ. We become an Easter people in God's love.

Our hearts are wrenched open by other deaths, too. Troubling stories of suffering and death in Haiti, for instance, have been with us for many years, but the earthquake of January 12 has focused our attention on the staggering new need for immediate relief and long-term restoration. It will take decades to work through this horrific tragedy: to respond with compassion, to learn about the conditions that make the people of Haiti so vulnerable in the face of such disaster, and to learn how God's love is known yet again even following so much death and destruction.

Friends and relatives ask me how I can believe in God at a time like this. Times like these, I say, have always shaped our understanding of God's love. We gather as friends of Jesus in the midst of death and respond in the love of Christ. We respond as Easter people in the midst of death and tragedy. After horrific death it can take a long time before we can really hear "Do not let your hearts be troubled"-but less time when we accompany one another. We are not alone.

Toronto Star reporter Catherine Porter returned recently from writing about life

and death on the streets of Port-au-Prince. She joined the Rev. Doug Norris in a dialogue sermon at Rosedale United Church (Toronto), and her account of the enormous strength of spirit and countless acts of hope she found among Haitians is one of the most inspiring presentations I've heard in a long time. She describes how tens of thousands of people gather in makeshift refugee camps for nightly worship, and how makeshift "street signs" have popped up along the paths between tents. One sign is titled Rue de l'amour. (You can hear the whole conversation at <http://rosedaleunited.org/sermon-archives/february-2010/february-28-2010/>).

John too keeps returning to God's love as his main theme. He remembers Jesus' prayers, such as "I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn. 17:26).

That love is in us still. I have been asked to lead, next week, a United Church delegation to gather with our brothers and sisters in Haiti. Following death, and in its midst, we will gather as members of one family around the presence of Jesus, opening ourselves to his peace, assurance, direction, and love. We will gather as a community of love. Our partners are so traumatized by these devastating events that communication remains extremely difficult and limited. Being with them is the best way to truly see and hear what we need to understand of their immediate and long-term needs. We will learn more about the love and challenge of Christ, together.

I am honoured to represent you in this pastoral visit. As members of The United Church of Canada we have already contributed over \$2.7 million for relief and restoration efforts. Our partners in Haiti are eager to welcome us. I look forward to sharing with you what they say about how we can be with them through this most difficult time. And I will bring them assurance of our continued commitment to stand with them as they rebuild their lives.

Please know that I continue to hold you in prayer daily. I commend John's testimony to you and extend Holy Week greetings and blessings to you in the name of our friend and saviour, Jesus Christ.

Easter blessings,

Mardi Tindal
Moderator

The United Church of Canada